LISTEN

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Moore

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LISTEN

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THE OUTDOOR GALLERY Thomas Kinsella

Life was a mute wrenching of the heart,
A wound in the red roof of the mouth. Often
The very accomplishment of its bitterness
Insisted one should smile and, smiling, accept.

Rain without structure fell from a sky ill-kept
Sighing: ' If you are going you are going,
And if you stay you stay, but you will change'.
The place you change in is where you are strangest.

Nowhere is stranger than the familiar — given
The intervention of a window-pane.
New love is reminiscent, like a plan,
Of loves you altered on before. Here, therefore.

Love, so regarded, nervous of rapture, placed
Item after item of beauty behind her.
Softly the lime of her own beauty traced
A structure in the rain. The sky grew kinder.

Over the mountain tops the night demurely
Loosened a clasp, opened her treasure trove.
Who would not give his ages for one star
To fix where it is warmest, on the tongue?

Climbing a star-lit mountain, Man With Beard
Greeted in gladness not transfiguration
But, for a while, himself, a Man With Lute,
And gave his soul up for the gift of thanks.

A BLACKBIRD SINGING — R. S. Thomas

Too late now, blackbird, you match your song
With the splendour of an afternoon
In early April, loading each note
With nature's sweetness, calling us forth
To youthful folly under the boughs
Of the tall trees.
The heart suffers
A long paralysis and cannot answer
As once to your soft challenge
To temper knowledge in the spring's green flame.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ELSEWHERE — Philip Larkin

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,
Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,
Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:
Once that was recognised, we were in touch.

Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint
Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,
The herring-hawker's cry, dwindling, went
To prove me separate, not unworkable.

Living in England has no such excuse:
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse.
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

WAKING IN A NEWLY-BUILT HOUSE, OAKLAND — Thom Gunn

The window, a wide pane in the bare
modern wall, is crossed by colorless
peeling trunks of the eucalyptus
recurring against raw sky-color.

It wakes me, and my eyes rest on it,
sharpening, and seeking merely all
of what can be seen, the substantial,
where the things themselves are adequate.

So I observe them, able to see
them as they are, the neutral sections
of trunk, spare, solid, lacking at once
disconnectedness and unity.

There is a tangible remoteness
of the air about me, its clean chill
ordering every room of the hill-
top house, and convoking absences.

Calmly, perception rests on the things,
and is aware of them only in
their precise definition, their fine
lack of even potential meanings.

THE FEEL OF HANDS — Thom Gunn

The hands explore tentatively,
two small live entities whose shapes
I have to guess at. They touch me
all, with the light of fingertips

Testing each surface of each thing
found, timid as kittens with it.
I connect them with amusing
hands I have shaken by daylight.

There is a sudden transition:
they plunge together in a full
formed single fury; they are grown
to cats, hunting without scruple;

they are expert but desperate.
I am in the dark. I wonder
when they grew up. It strikes me that
I do not know whose hands they are.

THE END OF THE CLUB

Alan Brownjohn

Today we watch the lease expire,
Having lived long enough to see
Ninety-nine summers total up
Our horrified longevity.

How will the president produce
Good reasons for his having said,
' This lease will be enough for us,
When it expires we shall be dead.' ?

How will he now conciliate
New members, eighty years unborn
When first we squandered all we had
On clubhouse, showers and tennis lawn?

Try as we will, with soothing words,
There is no means of making clear
That when we started on the lease
All our intentions were sincere.

For such a lack of foresight, you
Cannot atone. In vain you strive
After the right excuses when
In the long run, you're all — alive.

WE ARE MOVING TO A HOUSE

Charles Madge

We are moving to a house made of trees
Where a number of the boarders are birds.
It stands at a popular corner
And an intersection of railways.

This house was built by an Afrit
For his daughter, a London child.
He founded it deep in a crater
And he hung it on a pillar of blast.

Now the winds lull the little girl to sleep
Entering the uppermost storeys

With the air of familiar people
Coming to dust and to clean

But quietly, not to disturb her,
For between the branches of the attics
She must be suspended in the watchful
Eye of a magic so powerful.

Vanished between the traffic of the streets
Where the trucks and the rattling drays
Pass on their tracks and do not know
Roll on their journeys and do not see.

IN MY DREAMS — Stevie Smith

In my dreams I am always saying goodbye and riding away
Whither and why I know not nor do I care.
And the parting is sweet and the parting over is sweeter,
And sweetest of all is the night and the rushing air.

In my dreams they are always waving their hands and saying goodbye,
And they give me the stirrup cup and I smile as I drink,
I am glad the journey is set, I am glad I am going,
I am glad, I am glad, that my friends don't know what I think.

DEATH'S OSTRACISM — Stevie Smith

He trod in dream upon the brim
Of a deep sea, his mirth too young for him,
For all the people that he smiled upon
Cry: Fool. And they are gone.

With what hostility
And pride
They saw and fled,
He sighed.

The sea ran heavy on a core
Of hidden deep disturbance, ah before
The dream came had an earthquake first
The seabed burst.

Now from the depths
He sees
The sullied waters rise,
All is disease.

And the long reaching waves swing wide
Sick with death's taste upon the flooding tide
And dead sea monsters with a deep appal
Of open wounds upon the water sprawl.

His foothold slips,
The clay
Rank with long rains
Gives way,

But falling he will call the waves to friend,
Come cover over all and make an end.
No use, they will not do it, they swing aside.
Death's ostracism in a dream he must abide.

THE LOST CORAL

Elena Fearn

In the salt of the tide lies a lost coral.
That is your heart of love, a mile down,
Shoaled with the light shells and drift-offal
Yet alone, bright with grace, and foreign.

Or as a bird to Africa is lost,
Your seed-heart, blown over the world,
By chance caught on a height and rooted fast
Forces a red weed in a moment's cold.

Beyond sleep your green washes break
Above, or you grow over the snow's rigour;
And clear as the certain light to wake
Are the coral and the red Alpine flower.

TO MY BETE NOIRE

Elena Fearn

You certain spectre of the winter night:
Not crowned by fury's night,
But in being of the once-time dove
That with soft neck and steely eye
Far-off surprised my ancient breast with love.

You bird unfolded into the large sun:
Sheer phantom at midnight
Where the fever is cold, as it is now;
But next, at morning, tall as a giant
You stand with your haggard moving face of light.

And then this passing motion of quick love again
From wars too long.
You, whose sign is sunlight on the wall,
Be gentler image ever for my sleep,
That waking I may know you true kin.

INNOCENCE

Richard Kell

As children they would not compromise,
But spent their love and hate with swift conviction;
Their glances told no lies.

For such pure egoists the name
Was quite irrelevant till a wistful tutor
Carefully taught them shame.

And then it made some sense, for they
Discovered rival claims and clipped their passions
And were no longer gay.

Where once with innocence they could turn
All things to their advantage, now they're thought
Guilty of self-concern.

In small-talk you will see their eyes
Flicker and fight, searching for love again
And trying to tell lies.

CONCERNING THE POETS J. E. M. Lucie-Smith

And from their homes these persons were cast out
To live upon an island near the port;
Rations were sent them on a weekly boat;
They sang in snatches for the lack of sport.

With envious eyes they watched the traffickers
Whose ships went dipping past them in the bay,
Shouted for rescue, and were met with stares,
Were viewed by trippers on a holiday.

One spring the government was overthrown,
Food was not sent for that week or the next,
As they all watched, great fires consumed the town —
They feared starvation while the times were vexed.

Lobsters were found to disagree with verse,
So, tired of fish, accustomed to defy
Conventions from their isle, they bowed to force
And turned this race of anthropophagi.

THE TRAVELLERS Terence Hards

Who are these, you ask, who travel careless
Toward extensive landscape not their own
With nothing to record save that their eyes
Retrieve within them what can be no more known?—
And this the time when they for sorrow set
Their feet averting vision of a love
Too cruel to bear, too gentle to forget.

For they have spent their adoration now,
Renew no nightly terrors in the wind and rain,
Who in this more than morning sunlight
Stretch limbs forgetful, who need not love again.

Their love is less remembered as they go
And they have long since ceased to wonder how,
As they have suffered such long lack of presence,
So they have sworn there shall be no more now.

BLANK VERSES ON A SEA VOYAGE

G. J. Warnock

Moving in the landscape of a molten moon
Our well-lit, warm container of no friends
Can seem no world; we have left the living planet
And with the resourceless patience of new dead
Slide into the grey vein-emptying unforeseen.

When we had limbs then we were somewhere always,
Liable to hurt, so quick too to evade.
Now in what kind of space can what befall
The placeless watcher? Where in the thin not-world
Furrowing the moon can who be found that feels?

FLIGHT OVER MOUNTAINS

G. J. Warnock

Seen in a snug, well-sheltered bird's-eye-view
The landscape shows the meaning of ' dry land'.
Dun wrinkled hills display their valley-scars,
Remembering water in the ancient drought;
Lie there, a leathery dump of dinosaurs,
Their thick grey carcases thrown all about,
Deep shadows down between. Our days are few,
So we go fast. They measure time in sand
Washed off their rocks; we by the change of scene,
And think we could go back where we have been.

TOO MUCH LIGHT

G. J. Warnock

There are places in amusement parks, or were,
So rigged with lights and mirrors that your eyes
Are baffled in the criss-cross-tangled glare.
Specially your own familiar shape and size,
Glimpsed twenty times, answering as many ways
To each uncertain step, has power to stun.
And so you watch yourself, trapped in a maze
Of too much seeing, nearly worse than none.

Then there are portraits where the eyes and nose
Look different ways, or there are several eyes;
Explained as catching, while mere seeing shows
Each aspect singly, all diversities
Anatomized and clustered in one frame.
With every side in sight, but for the book
You couldn't give the best-known face a name —
Apart from thinking how absurd they look.

QUESTIONS

G. J. Warnock

Now we are quick with quiet steps and move
Easily in and out of mind and memory;
Do not stumble at hidden stairs, or shove
Inopportunely open the guarded cell;
But well control and care for, carefully
And with assurance order all things well.

But order may be easy, a children's game
Boring to play too long. What if our house
Should sulk one day, seem someone else's home,
Or show from windows gathering in the woods
Graceless invaders? — bald and barbarous
In gesture, foreign in their unreasoning moods.

Rooms might be lungs then and the heartless look
Or elbowing inroads of the uncouth band
Prove mortal as the stifling sea. Mistake
Tracks for a time of course, misread bad signs
As decadent empires do — what in the end
Would greet the end of order and good reigns?

Some, if the trim dyke at the flat land's lip
Should crumble and the sidling waters make
Their first quick spider's crawl, would run to keep
The rest at bay, hasty, with hands to guard
The incredible gap; would run with startled talk,
Losing their notes and stumbling, unprepared.

Or better lose than feebly try to win? —
The Stoic part borne stonily to the end
Although the stage should burn, the roof cave in,
And punier actors cut the stated play:
Wise not to want, most proud not to pretend
To rule what pilfering whims could take away.

VERSIONS FROM THE 'PAN TADEUSZ' OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ (1798-1855)

Donald Davie

1. REMEMBERING LITHUANIA

Who does not remember his boyhood, gun on shoulder,
Whistling through unobstructed fields?
Overstepping the bounds, yet offending no leaseholder
Of Lithuania, where the chase was free?

There ocean-goer, unmarked ship, the hunter
Ranged at large; as augur,
Read skies and clouds; or to townsmen occult, an enchanter,
Heard the earth-whisper.

Look in vain for the landrail, as lost down the meadow calling
As pike in the Niemen, and look
In vain overhead for the lark whose carillon falling
Around us rings in the Spring.

There an eagle wing rustles, appalling the sparrows,
A comet dismaying the stars. And a falcon,
Fluttering butterfly pinned, when a hare moves in the meadow
Stoops like a meteor.

When will the Lord God have us return, inhabit
Ancestral fields, bear arms
Against the birds, and only to ride down the rabbit
Muster our horse?

2. FEMME FATALE

Reared up above the stream, her shoulders
Let down upon green turf a shawl's
Unwindings of carnelian.
Swimmer in winter stooped above the water
Who almost will not, now as if drawn down
By amplitude of coral, by degrees
She droops, uncoils, subsides;
Palm propping temple, elbow on the grass,
Head bends to vellum. On its alabaster
Black ringlets wind and ribbons undulate.

Smaragdine brilliance of grass, a shawl's
Carnelian, and the fullness of a gown
Which in its coral drapery points up
Here the black hair and there the black of the shoes,
Concur with flanking whitenesses, the sheen
Of hose and linen, pallor of hand and brow —
So variously she crawls upon the distance,
A caterpillar on a maple green.

3. EXTRAVAGANZA

Fate had designed thither the Count should lead
His retinue upon ' a vengeful task '.
But this he can forget,
Aeolian frogs — ah Poland, blest indeed —
So charm his ear. A place so picturesque
He'd not encountered yet:

Smooth and clear cheeks of water on the one hand,
The other's reaches dark with manly down,
Two pools like lovers lean
Their heads together. One, thick willows crown;
The other, a blonde aureole of sand.
And both go dressed in green.

Linking the hands that are their outlet rills
And falling moon-tracked, ravelling as it flows
Those skeins of light, they turn
To one steep stream. The genius of the lake bestows
Her spangles idly on the wave that flows
From her unemptying urn.

Where alders start to mask it, only the shaken sliver
Of moonlight moves upon the level bight
That stood, else; so the snake
Giwojtos in the moss draws out of sight
When only gold's alternate flash with silver
On its back, shows it awake.

A surly guardian hidden in the dell
Eavesdrops on lovers, stammers menaces,
Shaking his head, his hands
(Those knuckled fists), his mossy brow. It is
The champing of the toothed jaws of the mill
Drowns the soft talk of the ponds.

THE PROBLEM OF PLEASURE

Visitations. Poems by Louis MacNeice. (Faber & Faber, 1957, 10/6.)
The Stones of Troy, by C. A. Trypanis. (Faber & Faber, 1957, 10/6.)
The Sense of Movement, by Thom Gunn. (Faber & Faber, 1957, 10/6.)

Not long ago I gave a talk to a group of people who hold an annual conference simply because they all get an active pleasure out of reading poetry. This wasn't a highbrow society, though some members seemed to enjoy modern verse — one of them quoted *Visitations* spontaneously, in a discussion on something else. While this was going on it struck me that getting some fun out of modern poetry was pretty unusual. Most people who take an interest in it (this still means something slightly different from 'poets') tend to be grim about it. Faced with an either-or choice between *utile* and *dulce* they would perforce pick the latter; but their *dulce* isn't the same as that of my recent audience. Pleasure is how poetry works; but some serious substance shows through the sugar of delight, unless the work in question is avowedly 'light' verse, practical cats not wastelands. What hardly anybody does is read poetry 'for pleasure,' and in any case the great bulk of modern poetry, like the Bible, was not designed to be read as literature, but as truth. We are always, though in extremely subtle ways, asking how true poems are. Our first reaction to a new poem is to judge it. That's why it was nice in a way to find people who read it quite uncritically and got a good generalised unfinicking belt out of it, even though it meant they were, on your view and mine, pretty undiscriminating. Poetry is to them rather as novels and memoirs are to us.

It is an interesting comment on the toughness and intransigence of poets that they have not all lost their nerve, knowing their purse-lipped audience for what it is, and writing a language over-specialised, incurably perhaps, by the necessarily defensive posture of modern poetry. Some poets, some of the best poets, are still entertainers: Mr Graves puns, like Milton, in serious places, and spellbinds us; Mr Durrell reminds us that the imagination, which we habitually think of as a tragic faculty, may be comic on occasion, and even farcical; Mr Enright has had the happiness to rediscover the quick delight of the sketch, often writing with, and for, spontaneous pleasure.

No one has more persistently triumphed over the native solemnity of the modern muse than Mr MacNeice. If we read poetry for the immediate civilised pleasure it might give us, we should find him about the least dispensable of modern poets. Pace, intelligence, novelty — all these he now, as always, provides, and without the occasional preciosity of the pre-war poems. (If I admit that I shall re-read them more often than *Visitations* it is not to make a value-judgment; we owe a sentimental debt to the poems of our adolescence.) The new book opens

with a poem 'To the Public,' examining very briefly a myth of the poet. 'We' aren't 'sensitive'; we 'enjoy ourselves at other men's expense'; 'We do not need your indulgence, much less your pity'; we have more freedom than you, and so on. This is a more complicated little poem than it looks; 'you are right in supposing that we are different from you lot,' it says or seems to say, 'but the difference is not of the sort you imagine, though it is easy to see how, in a fool, the mistake occurs. But stop being sentimental about us and solemn about our poems. We are free, lucky and coarse.' I find the pose here agreeably unstable; but the remark about enjoyment at another's expense is straight enough, and fair warning about how to read Mr MacNeice if one doesn't want to be a victim. He knows more, and knows differently, and knows how to throw what he knows at one; grant him that, which is simple fact, and grant him no more. Then enjoy him.

Mr MacNeice has a considerable variety of styles; he was always an experimenter, though never a revolutionary one, in prosody, and he always ranged from one extreme of vivid philosophical verse to another of folksy, straws-in-the-hair song and satire, with gaps in between which he steadily fills. The folksy is not my favourite MacNeice manner:

> Here come I, old April Fool,
> Between March hare and nuts in May.
> Fool me forward, fool me back,
> Hares will dance and nuts will crack.

I find this a bore. A related manner is the one he adopts for some Hibernian topics:

> Where can you find a fire that burns and gives no warmth?
> Where is the tall ship that chose to run on a rock?

When I read Mr MacNeice in this mood I remember a distich greatly admired by Yeats:

> The periwinkle and the tough dogfish
> At eventide have got into my dish —

because this is the real thing, and Mr MacNeice's jigging and gnomic vein is not. As usual with a poet of great resources, he is very impressive when he is plain; the closing lines of 'Wessex Guidebook' are an example. Doing a lot, with rhythm or image, he sometimes loses force, as in 'The Rest House'.

But this is the cost of variety; one never knows what comes next. 'Death of an old Lady' is a queer but fascinating development of Hardy's 'The Converging of the Twain', an entirely original poem. 'Time for a Smoke', on the other hand, is Mr. MacNeice's third (at least) treatment of the British Museum; the least interesting of the three, perhaps, but it's nice to compare them. The sequence called 'Visitations' is a set of vigorous and serious poems about poetry; of much that might be said I will choose only the point that they are rhythmically a great deal more interesting than poems more overtly professing to offer that kind of interest. So, in III, there is a beautiful effect got by the juxtaposition of short or fussily broken lines with a fine. slow mouth-filler:

Each on a lonely rock with none but gulls to talk to
And each, he thinks, she thinks, unable to cross
That line to which their constellations bow . . .

And the effect is perfectly repeated in three stanzas. The pleasure is neatly conveyed, and if we are lucky and not too coarse we can share it.

Professor Trypanis will also entertain us; being an epigrammatist by nature he lives, partly, by the pleasant shocks he can provide. *The Stones of Troy* reprints 19 of the 24 poems in his earlier volume *Pegasus*, and the omissions are very well made, though I regret 'Un Voyage à Cythère': all the same, I see that this poem might be called a little soft, and sentimentality is a danger for Professor Trypanis. He avoids it by constantly attempting great metrical sophistication and saying his pay-off lines with a sarcastic intonation that doesn't often fully succeed. In 'The Purple Cloak', to take an example, the verse has a modish, post-Poundian flavour, but also two cases of this poet's most irritating mannerism, the separation of related words by line-ending pauses to no evident purpose:

Nothing can compare with his gladiatorial
Shows . . .

It is not in good taste to be the Emperor's
Guest, and to attract greater attention . . .

There is a lot of this in the free-verse poems. Mr Trypanis is rhythmically pleasant, perhaps most of all when he is not writing stanzas, but I think one gets a fair idea of his inferiority to Mr MacNeice as a metrist if one compares the last passage I quoted from *Visitations* for its fine regular iambic, with this from 'The Purple Cloak' — again what effect there is comes from the juxtaposition of a strong blank verse line with others that are fidgety, colloquial, sarcastic:

His imperial banquets are, of course, unique:
Outré flesh and fish, Chian wine, exciting sauces,
And women schooled in Oriental love.

But what I really have against this characteristic poem is the failure of its epigrammatic conclusion.

It is not in good taste to be the Emperor's
Guest, and to attract greater attention
Than his sacred person does. And no one is more
sensitive to things in bad taste than Caligula.

The epigrammatist cannot afford to fumble his punchline. Compare the end of 'Thermopylae 1941', an interestingly bad poem:

Leonidas is only a matter of precedence.

Or the last line of 'Deiphobos':

It is Deiphobos who let you down.

Or of 'Songs':

Quality can be a matter of circumstance.

I shall risk being churlish, and say that the difficulty here is a linguistic one. Mr Trypanis' English is a poet's English, sensitive, deep and broad; but the hardest thing is to make a joke in a foreign language.

An epigram is a sort of joke; and if I say that this poet never seems to crack his joke quite in his own manner all I mean is that his pose becomes obvious and unsteady at the critical point of poems like these, and that this may be explained by his attempting English idiom at its most impenetrable point.

It is time to say how great is the benefit, in other poems, that accrues from the poet's special accomplishments — a learned Greek writing a language by tradition receptive of Greek influence, and in the indestructibly philhellenist air of England. It is, in fact, the blend of English and Greek hellenism that gives these poems their peculiar and often delightful flavour. Professor Trypanis meditates the text of Homer with the sympathy of a Greek and the irony of a modern poet; the whole tradition between Homer and Cavafy, the great still world of Byzantium, inform his mind. That is why he seems to me to be at his best in the Homeric comments, and in poems about the conflicts and complexities of the Greek world, like 'Theonichos and Mnesarete'. Curiously enough, by some trick I cannot understand, the lines of Trypanis that continue to occur most readily to my mind are from 'The Arrival', a poem perhaps justly omitted from this collection.

stor -pale
Hands of sailors clenched on granite oars. They
Are the victims, because Odysseus tricked the god — sail
And stone faces staring through the raging spray.

The reason may be that this powerful, un-Homeric, re-imagining of a Homeric situation gives me a more permanent pleasure than any chancy modern irony.

With the third of the books under review my own pose breaks down. It is, in a way that the other are not, a *serious* and *important* collection of poems by an enormously gifted young man, and it would be trivial to lump them in with the remainder of any batch. Mr Gunn is a metaphysical poet in any sense you like. To take the purely literary sense, he contrives, in 'A Plan of Self Subjection', to write a genuinely Donne-like poem; this is much more surprising than it seems because we have all been seeing Donne t' rough a Symbolist mist, and poems meant to be like his have really been another sort of thing altogether. This one sees Donne steadily. His kind of stanzaic argument, his kind of centripetal logic-chopping, turn up here in what is, partly because nobody else has ever caught it, a brilliantly original poem.

I put this pen to paper and my verse
Imposes form upon my fault described
So that my fault is worse —
Not from condonement but from being bribed
With order : and with this it appears strong,
Which lacks all order that it can exist.
Yet before very long
From poem back to original I twist.

Mr Gunn is greatly preoccupied at present with one form of a problem that has to torment a highly self-conscious modern artist, the

problem of how his own intellectual or visionary activities relate to 'real' action, which always seems to be relatively valuable even when it has no direction or end. The first poem in this book, already well-known, is 'On the Move', which uses the mass motorcycle cavalcades of the American Brando-type Boys as an image of this activity. It is a wonderfully wrought poem, and culminates in a generalisation of such complex beauty that one is tempted to believe, wrongly I think, that the third of the lines quoted below was a 'given' one:

> The self-defined, astride the created will
> They burst away; the towns they travel through
> Are homes for neither bird nor holiness,
> For birds and saints complete their purposes.

Mr Gunn, who is young enough to remind us, a little too strongly sometimes, of other poets, has the honour for a moment, in that line, to recall Wallace Stevens at his best. Not that this is habitual; Mr Gunn has a very various vocabulary at hand for the making of poetic-philosophical statements. We see this in another motor-cycle poem, where the precise, indeed terse, treatment is what he has learnt, in a now old-fashioned way, from the seventeenth century, and from Mr Eliot:

> Cell after cell the plants convert
> My special richness in the dirt:
> All that they get, they get by chance.
> And multiply in ignorance.

It seems to me excellent that Mr Gunn has this traditional preoccupation, because it foretells a long development from what is by any standards a tremendously impressive start. One of the most abstract and difficult of these meditations, 'During an Absence', astonishes me at each reading by the correctly strange disposition of detail and the accurate novelty of the thought, which is closely bound to Mr Gunn's central pre-occupation. A few lines are not a great deal of good on their own, but the quality of these, even in isolation, is obvious, and it is a good many years since any poet under thirty did anything so finished and so satisfying:

> No, if there were bright things to fasten on
> There'd be no likeness to the play,
> But under a self-generated glare
> Any bad end has possibility,
> The means endurance. I declare
> I know how hard upon the ground it shone.

Without understanding the argument, you can still see that a fine poet wrote this; and none the less fine for understanding his Yeats.

Sometimes the 'thought' tears through too crudely, as in 'The Inherited Estate'; sometimes Mr Gunn treads, uneasily, Mr Larkin's territory. These are faults; also the preoccupation with toughs would become tedious in the unlikely event of his persisting with it. But to read any of the poems from which I have quoted, or 'Merlin in the Cave' or the beautiful poem to Yvor Winters, is to see beyond possibility

of deception that Mr Gunn has already solved the problem which defeats minor poets in our time: the reconciliation of image and discourse. Faced with the prospect of a major poet to dismay us, we may cease to worry much about what can amuse us on idle evenings.

Frank Kermode

A PERPETUAL SURPRISE

A Winter's Right and Other Poems, Elena Fearn. (Hand & Flower Press, 8/6.)

To Elena Fearn, 'Poetry is a perpetual surprise'. In some interesting notes printed on the wrapper of her poems she reveals that, to her, what is conscious in the mind does not make a poem. She often is tempted to write a poem about a normal emotional situation, but is unable to realise it poetically until it has descended from the conscious to the unconscious, and what emerges is not what was expected. In fact, poems are to her a perpetual surprise. Such 'confessions' — and they are not intended to be a manifesto or a complete *ars poetica* — are as helpful as such things usually are, and no more so. For whatever Elena Fearn's own notions about the genesis of her poems, the resulting poems are more than commonly interesting and satisfactory. They have, indeed, a dream-like quality — though Miss Fearn has no especial interest in psychology — not in the sense in which one uses that word of, say, De la Mare, but in the sense that dreams are the least 'dreamy' of happenings: they are hard, precise and vivid. And this is what the best of these poems are.

They are not 'easy' poems; they do not yield a tidy, logical prose meaning. They are, like dreams, mental events, 'situations', to use Miss Fearn's own word. They strike one as being 'right', with a rightness which comes from their own inner consistency: they are sometimes disturbing, sometimes haunted with clear but elusive meanings of an almost surrealistic clarity and sharpness.

Rhythmically, these poems are never less than interesting, at best exciting. The diction is always at least adequate to the occasion, often superb. The technique, the craftsmanship, is subtle; for although one may sometimes detect what appears to be a clumsiness, one can never say it is not part of the intention, the 'surprise'.

> After that, I was skinny and small in a port;
> I had no house, there was nothing to find
> Except some mean stars at a telescope's end.
> I started away, and I sailed on the boards,
> And the boards went down, and I was drowned.

It is not easy to quote representatively, partly because some of the best poems are too long to be quoted in full and, like most proper poems, need full quotation: yet almost any few lines contain this disturbing

quality of surprise — a surprise which comes, not from any forced originality or queerness, but quite inevitably, as the flora of a particular landscape seem to spring naturally from the climate.

I don't go all the way with all of the poems in this book — some seem to me too odd for acclimatisation amidst my conceptions of what a poem can be. But there are enough, and more than enough which are arresting, moving and haunting for me to feel that the failure in communication may sometimes be at my end. The impact of the book as a whole is of a very sensitive and unusual mind at work with a very assured manner in the handling of a wide variety of themes. I cannot help feeling that younger poets would find *A Winter's Right* a plentiful fountain of suggestion and a relief from some of the staler modes of expression which have found currency during the past thirty years. Perhaps because she has not adopted these modes, editors have been slow to recognise Elena Fearn's qualities. I am still indignant, but no longer surprised, that poems like these have not readily come into print.

James Reeves

THE BRUTAL TONE*

**The Hawk in the Rain,* Ted Hughes. (Faber & Faber, 10/6.)
Heart of Grace, Patrick Galvin. (Linden Press, 7/6.)
The Red Leaf, Christopher Hassall. (O.U.P., 15/-.)
The Succession, Quentin Stevenson. (O.U.P., 10/6.)

The Hawk in the Rain has had a remarkable record of success. Its author was unknown a year ago, and only eleven of this collection of forty poems had appeared (ten of them in the U.S.A.) before the book itself was printed. It was given the First Publication Award of the New York Poetry Center (the judges were W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Marianne Moore), and was a choice of the Poetry Book Society. It has received considerable praise from some reviewers, and nothing much worse than a reserved approval from most. Yet the book turns out to be of a dismaying badness which perplexes one into wondering how on earth all this could have happened.

The entire impact of these poems (and *impact* does not mean *quality*) derives from one source: Mr Hughes' ability to invest the material provided by a very narrow range of themes with an almost physical immediacy and vividness. The main methods by which he achieves this are a slangy, self-consciously turbulent diction (at random: 'stink', 'bang', 'crash', 'boozed', 'muck', 'junk', 'get', 'tool' — the last two being used as sexual nouns) and a raw, sex-and-violence imagery. Here are the opening lines of 'Macaw and Little Miss':

In a cage of wire-ribs
The size of a man's head, the macaw bristles in a staring
Combustion, suffers the stoking devils of his eyes.
In the old lady's parlour, where an aspidistra succumbs
To the musk of faded velvet, he hangs as in clear flames,
Like a torturer's iron instrument preparing
With dense slow shudderings of greens, yellows, blues,
Crimsoning into the barbs;

The melodramatic and slapdash hyperbole of this is characteristic. With this kind of writing one could endlessly question words and images; question here, for example, the use of this particular bird for the sake of a heightened literary effect (the species is too big for a cage of that size, so it can't be a real macaw and is probably only a parrot). But there is little point in asking these questions unless there are signs of something better. Unfortunately, Mr Hughes seems well set in this manner and not able to go beyond it. The more ambitious the attempt, the worse the mess becomes (see the third and fourth verses of 'Incompatibilities', the sixth and seventh of 'Egg-head'.) One of his gimmicks is to take the first striking image to come up on the escalator from the subconscious and elaborate it. In 'The Horses' he has a mental picture of himself emerging from a forest on a frosty morning and seeing the animals standing still in the distance. Describing them, 'huge in the dense grey', he hits upon some impressive phrases; but when he tries, at the end, to make the poem into something more than this, it collapses into banality:

In the din of the crowded streets, going among the years,
the faces,
May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place
Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,
Hearing the horizons endure.

The poem is a failure, because expanding one sudden, unaccountable image is just not enough. The lines do not seem to have arisen from any pressure of genuine experience or feeling, any process of active and selective thinking. (In the same way, the much-praised 'Thought-Fox' poem is really only a poetic variation on the old game of 'What do you see when you shut your eyes?').

How has *The Hawk in the Rain* acquired its reputation? At a guess: after a time, the mud thrown at any conscious 'movement' of writers (whose tactics, to be fair, sometimes deserve it) will stick, and people will begin to look for new and original writers who will have nothing to do with the prevailing doctrines of the time. This deliberate search for newness (publisher, reviewer and reader all have a part in it) is nothing but praiseworthy if it is carried on in a disinterested spirit, and not in the hope of refuting somebody else's ideas and practices. And it justifies itself if it uncovers writers who have important statements to make in a genuinely original manner. Occasionally, however, a disservice is done both to literature (and, more particularly, to a promising new writer) when the wrong book receives this kind of reception.

We know what happened to Mr Colin Wilson at the hands of the religious rebels in the Sunday newspapers. It is now the turn of Mr Hughes to be forced to play Lambert Simnel for another set of king-makers.

Mr Patrick Galvin's verse comes at you with a nightmare flurry of images in what might be called the 'Celtic Surrealist' style:

I beat the four walls with my heart
And with a pin I scratched them
But it made no mark at all
Though I tried one day after another.

My soul burnt itself up
And a terrible ice grew round my breast
Then four men with strong faces
Tied me to a tree made of iron.

I imagine most English readers will say 'No' to this kind of writing, and certainly you cannot look at it too closely. Nevertheless, taking it as a whole, the title-poem 'Heart of Grace' (from which these lines are quoted) undoubtedly succeeds as a kind of allegory of guilt, persecution and defiance; and 'Day of Rebellion', despite a very flat conclusion, gives a moving and original version of the events of Easter, 1916. One has to concede the 'dramatic' success of these two poems, and in fact Mr Galvin reads his own poetry aloud (very well) with no regard for anything except the dramatic impact of his themes — so that rhyme, rhythm and individual images are severely played down. In other poems, where the theme is weak, or elusive, the temptation to indulge in fantasy of a sinister-whimsical kind, is too great. Most of the shorter poems here are exercises in this vein; except for 'An Chaisideach Ban', a wonderful short love poem.

There is some poetry embedded very deeply in Mr Hassall's *The Red Leaf*. But for the most part it is a sad story of lax, rambling verse and suburban 'poetic' material which leaves no stronger impression than of a diffuse, Georgian pleasantness. These lines come at the end of his poem 'Still Life':

apples
Are their own chronicle to the core, and the first
Astringent bite that shocks the palate starts
A summary of countless cool events.

But these lines, quite attractive though unexceptional, come only after fifty lines in which the 'chronicle' has been minutely told — from the roots of the apple-tree absorbing water to the barrow-boy weighing out Mr Hassall's half-pound. This kind of spoiling of one's chances in poetry comes of working at low pressure and wandering without forethought or discrimination after any attractive triviality. There are exceptions, such as the fine poem 'Eurídice', but in general the book displays little sense of poetry as either a strenuous or a rewarding activity involving the conscious choice or rejection of ideas or purposes. One wants to ask Mr Hassall (who shows in places that he knows

about his limitations) to pare everything down, tidy up his technique, and start putting his lyrical gift to better effect.

The Succession, also, is rather an unhappy book. Mr Stevenson's talent for a modest and thoughtful (though rather inhibited) poetry, has become lost in arch imprecision and embarrassing pretentiousness. Sometimes, cleverness has been the trouble. There is a promising poem called 'The Dancer' which seems to be making some sort of point about poetry and experience; but the theme has been so muffled in wilful ellipsis and learned reference as to ruin any effect it might have had. Most often, however, Mr Stevenson seems quite unaware that he is not being at all clear. The poem 'Medusa' (one of a sequence of six) begins:

> And lust's Medusa each day leaves more stone,
> The sailor paddles in what was his sea.
> Each scales the other as if still to free
> Possible music where there now is none.

The idea seems to be that although sexual love by itself is unproductive, the people in the poem go on trying to build something out of it. The word 'lust' and the image of 'the sailor' help to suggest that the poet is mainly thinking of a masculine impulse; so why use Medusa? And why, after 'stone' introduce active images of swimming or sailing and climbing (the latter, in any case, is more of an impotence symbol than one denoting fulfilment). Nearly all of the poems in the book are written in the same halting, uncertain and implacably private vein, as if the author was altogether unwilling to be frank.

Alan Brownjohn

NORMAN CAMERON

1905 - 1953

WHEN I first started to write and read poetry, at the age of twelve, at a small public school which had been evacuated to a deserted Devonshire holiday resort, full of rusted slot-machines which we could not work, and derelict cafes which were used as classrooms, I was not concerned with theories. I had not then been tempted to equate it with the deficiencies of my own character, society's rejection of its truth-seeking nature with my own disappointments. The drama of 'coming up' from the junior school into the hostile senior school, though it seems local and silly now, is nevertheless intense to one who has already discovered that 'the world' is hostile, if not to poets, then to the values in which poets believe, to what poetry itself stands for.

The books in my 'tuck-box' (as we called these objects), the poetry to which I responded, gave the lie to the false values which my immediate environment, in the shape of my contemporaries, and my education, in the bizarre shape of my teachers, were alike attempting to foist upon me. I was then too innocent to make the pretence that my own ambitions were true; it was poetry which counted. It was the poems which were true. They were real comments on the artificial world in which I lived; they saved me from hating it because the truth about its real nature was so much more exciting, so much more fruitful and positive, than the colourless denial which so often results from unhappiness at this crucial age. This stage in our lives is 'romantic', but its validity can never be recaptured: the best poems get to mean too much; many of those we love are seen to be failures. Those few which survive, which mean more to us as we grow older, which are able to carry the increasing weight of our own growing experience and yet remain vital and true, are the best. And those which we have discovered earliest and lived with longest are, of course, those to which we become most attached.

I did not know Norman himself very well. I first met him when I was fifteen; but *The Winter House,* his first book, which was published by Dent in 1935, and which is reprinted without alteration in his *Collected Poems,** was an integral part of my mental landscape, of the way I responded to my environment. I could never quite satisfactorily establish the connection between the poems and Norman himself; and this may not only have been due to the fact that I did not know him for a very long time: his poems were always written only by the poetic side of him, and never by any of the other aspects of his many-sided character. What was remarkable about him was not, perhaps, the extent of his poetic ability (he was not a breath-taking poet like Shakespeare or Donne), but his awareness and integrity. He never wanted to be known or admired as a poet except to those who were

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* The Hogarth Press, 15/-.

capable of understanding what, as a poet, he was trying to do: in other words, to those few who realised that in his poems, unlike the ambitious contemporaries whose work seems so pale and bloodless beside his own. Norman did not wish to mix his human desires and aspirations with what took the place, for him, of his Calvinist Scotch conscience: a feeling of obligation to tell the truth about himself. But this did not mean he was one of those 'academic' versifiers whose work, so often reminiscent of his own in style if not in content, is sometimes described as poetry.

Robert Graves is right, in his introduction to *The Collected Poems,* in implying that Norman was a part-time poet. But how rare full-time poets are! And how much more of a poet was Norman, who wrote his comparatively few poems only when he had to solve a problem about himself, than his numerous and better-known contemporaries whose multitudinous works, on all sorts of 'major themes' of which no individual can have direct knowledge or concern, are generally accepted as the sage produce of full-time poets! No one's poems speak more fully for themselves. What can you say to add to *The Winter House* itself, one of Norman's finest poems?

> Out of the showering snow itself to build
> Under the lintel that the eyebrows form
> A winter house, whose phantom planks are filled
> By old storm holding back against new storm,
> By flakes too numerous for enmity
> (No room to hate a multitude); and so
> To shelter under a false canopy
> And play at happy hutman in the snow
> — This cannot last for long; a prickly threat
> Assails me, of disaster overhead,
> The ruinous working of that inward heat
> That I had hoped would serve to warm my bed.
> Now may the coward eyebrows try in vain
> To re-assert the downward-pouring roof.
> It honourably joins the snow again,
> And comes to put my native fire to proof.

And yet when I show this poem to people they almost always moan, as if they were a little afraid, as if they didn't really want to be concerned with this sort of thing at all, but would rather happily humble themselves in the bright sun of some 'major talent's' 'major statement': 'Yes, but what is all this kind of thing *about?*' The reason for this response is that they don't read poetry correctly: they expect it to be, and read it as, a sort of bastard-metaphysics in verse — an idea hotted up with feeling. The realism, and the casual (and predominantly poetic) objectivity about self, displayed in such poems as this, disturbs people but they do not want to investigate it. Their reaction is not unlike the embarrassed silence of a group of people when someone makes an honest criticism of himself, not as the expression of

an attitude, but casually and as a matter of fact. Good God', they seem to be thinking, 'This man insults *himself*!

Another type of comment which poetry of this sort elicits is: 'This is all very well, but it doesn't seem very important: the poet seems to exist in a mythology of his own.' The point is that the 'major theme', in which true poets of a reputation too great to be dismissed as 'minor', like Shakespeare, have long ago been wrapped, is safer for the mind because it is farther from the uncomfortable sort of reality with which poetry deals. Poems such as Norman's ring true because they deal with this local reality with such a degree of intensity that, although the subject is necessarily and essentially 'solipsist', it nevertheless achieves communicability.

Norman's most ambitious poems (in the sense of 'profound' rather than of 'competitive') usually failed because, in order to write them at all, he was forced to use a slightly over-elaborated *idea*. Nevertheless, these poems (I am thinking of two in particular), which are remarkable by any standards, and amazing by standards of today, do a great deal more than pages of criticism to demonstrate the total lack of poetic impulse in the 'crossword-puzzle' 'school' of poets — now going rather out of fashion again, or possibly abandoning verse — who were in the forefront a year or two ago. They are important, not only in their own right, but as examples of the way in which even a genuine poetic sensibility, where it is not wholly engaged, fails. The themes of both *The Successor* and *The Wanton's Death* are profound and fundamental, but the poems themselves just fall short, not of a conviction of tone, but completeness of statement. I will quote *The Successor*:

> My spark flew round and round the outer ring,
> Challenged the flame of his burnt-offering,
> That knew the menace, and went small and blue.
> And old Sadokiel wavered, and the dark
> Ushered him outward, through the small priests' door.
> And all the people shouted, and my spark
> Descended on the altar with a roar
> Of rising flame. And I stood forth, the new
> High Priest, when lo there, lo! how the flame threw
> A well-known antique shadow on the floor,
> The tall cap and the beard just as before
> — I was Sadokiel! And now menacing
> A spark flew round and round the outer ring.

Here, the situation which gives the poem its frame of reference, the deposition or displacement of one high priest by another, is not sufficiently integrated with its occasion. But when Norman was writing about his own problem of the degree to which he felt he wished to follow, or that to which he had followed, his poetic compulsions, it is difficult to find fault with his poems. As he became older he wrote less, and what he did write became somewhat thinner and more occasional; but he never wrote a dishonest line.

His *Collected Poems* is cheaply bound and, at 15/- expensive—but no one need blame the publisher for this. It is easily the most important book of poems to be published since the war.

Martin Seymour-Smith

CRITIQUE OF POPULAR CULTURE

The Uses of Literacy. Aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments. By Richard Hoggart. (Chatto & Windus, 25/-.)

THE borderlands of literary criticism and sociology have been explored before by F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, George Orwell and others. Yet there are some features of Richard Hoggart's book which make it different from its fore-runners.

In the first place, sociology itself has more to offer than formerly, as can be seen from Mr Hoggart's bibliography. There are now a few recent studies of English society to which he has found it worth while to refer. I feel sure that the compliment will be repaid, and that sociology students will be advised to read 'The Uses of Literacy', especially the first five chapters which are probably the best available account of working-class life in the older housing areas of large industrial cities.

In the second place, Mr Hoggart seems to express a working-class point of view' which is not connected with the politics of conflicting economic interest, although it is a protest against a new kind of exploitation. In the past, the working-class has often itself been blamed for the deterioration of standards. Mr Hoggart sees the situation as one in which the native morality and culture of his class of origin is threatened by commercial banality and cynicism.

Mr Hoggart has a disinterested piety in relation to his own background which makes him superior to the 'amusing' type of literary sociology exemplified in Nancy Mitford. 'Snobbism about one's hereditary group can be attractive when there is no suspicion of pandering to climbers: a condition fulfilled by Mr Hoggart, not by Miss Mitford. The man of culture has always felt the need to defend the best in what was passing, and thus to safeguard the inclusion in the 'cultural heritage' of elements (like heroism, chivalry, rusticity) derived from obsolete social systems. As Mr Hoggart points out, it is in their adaptation to a hostile environment and in their oral tradition of humorous realism that earlier generations of the urban industrial working-class have been creative. Very little of this has been distilled into writing or art that will survive. I am doubtful whether the older working-class magazines of the '*Peg's Paper* tradition' should be seriously lamented, any more than the older working-class neighbourhoods: 'street after regular street of shoddily uniform houses intersected by a dark pattern

of ginnels and snickets (alley-ways) and courts; mean, squalid and in a permanent half-fog'. Both the houses and the magazines were wished on the working-class rather than created by them. What is moving and reassuring about working-class sensibility is its capacity for resistance to the assaults made upon it, and for transmuting the cheap and the vulgar within its own homely and human context.

The mental, moral and aesthetic world of the working-class is peopled from three distinct and largely separate and independent sources: family tradition, education and the 'mass-media'. One effect of education is to weaken family tradition and strengthen the influence of the mass-media. What can or should be done about it? Will more education, or better education, help individuals to remain more individually rooted in their own authenticity? On the whole, the evidence suggests that only the very exceptional scholarship boy (Richard Hoggart in fact) uses his education in this constructive way. More education is likely to make the average boy or girl more rather than less susceptible to mechanical exploitation by words and images.

A better hope of stopping this kind of rot lies in a raising of standards at the producer end among journalists, entertainers, producers, editors, owners, boards of directors. The vulgarity which they propagate is as much, or more, an artificial product of *their* minds as of mass-demand. The situation is indeed likely to get worse before it gets better, but commercialism may in time grow tired and ashamed of its own excesses. Social critics like Richard Hoggart can help to speed this process. I find it very interesting that his book has been so well received and that, for example, it was listed in a lower-than-middle brow Birmingham evening paper as a local best-seller. This suggests that the points which it makes are acceptable to the fairly wide public which by now is more or less intelligently disoriented and perplexed about its own and other people's values.

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